

The Moral Libertarian Horizon, Volume 2

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(Revision from Volume 1)

The Moral Libertarian: A Moral Case for Liberty and Liberalism

In recent years, it has become fashionable to look down upon liberalism. It started on the right a few decades ago.

American conservatives quite successfully painted American liberals as people who are elitist, out of touch, and spend tax dollars 'liberally' just because they want to. Now this disease has spread to the left. While American conservatives still use the l-word to describe everyone to their left, resulting in ridiculous phrases like 'Bernie Sanders is very liberal' (when he won't even support free trade), a new generation of leftists have identified themselves as socialists and pit their identity against those people they call liberal, as in Bernie is a socialist, Hillary is a liberal. While the attacks on liberalism come from different angles, they share some common themes: liberals are out of touch elitists, supporters of the privileged establishment, enemy of the common good, technocrats who think they know what's best for everyone, and so on. A very sad description indeed, especially for the ideology of Locke, Mill and Burke, the ideology of both Keynes and Hayek, the ideology of such great leaders as Prime Minister Lloyd George and President Franklin Roosevelt, and the ideology of most early feminists.

Liberalism's Fall From Grace

So how did liberalism fall so far from grace? I believe the answer lies in idealism, or rather, the lack thereof. As liberalism came from the margins into the mainstream of political thought, it took on the reins of government more and more frequently. By the mid 20th century, liberalism became identified with governments, who was inevitably made up mostly by elite and establishment figures, and whose day-to-day job was mostly concerned with making practical decisions, often on the advice of technocratic 'experts'. In other words, what was once conservatism's weakness became liberalism's weakness. We can actually see that at the same time, in the former Soviet block, these establishment characteristics became lumped in with socialism. We can also see that, as western conservatives started losing their grip on the establishment, they started finding their idealistic voice again, and began to attack liberals as the new 'establishment'. Looking at the bigger picture, we can see that liberalism caught the disease of the establishment in the mid 20th century, and never quite recovered. Being in the establishment makes a movement lose sight of its ideals, and this insight may still fail to recover even if the establishment position is lost.

I think it is safe to say that liberalism is no longer the establishment, right now, to put it very mildly. As of this writing (2018), liberalism only accounts for a minority of world leaders. US president Donald Trump is surely not

liberal. In fact, both conservatism and socialism are arguably stronger than liberalism at this point in history. Why? Because they have an ideal, they have a narrative. Right now, libertarianism is the only branch of the liberal tree to have anything close to a strong narrative built on strong principles. And even much of libertarianism isn't based on a moral worldview like conservatism or socialism. The moral consequences of consistently applying the Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) remains a controversial thing for many people, and libertarians have often argued their case on economic efficiency and lower taxes to avoid this controversy. I'm not making this up: some libertarians have argued that their ideology will allow people to truly follow their moral compass without collective coercion from society, while others have argued that with all property being private property, socially deviant behaviour will be effectively suppressed by the property owners acting out of their self interest. Which simply looks like, the consequences of a libertarian government will be what I want it to be. As for the form of liberalism that comes with a welfare state, it looks even worse. If welfare state liberalism is all about equality and wealth redistribution, wouldn't it be even more principled to go straight for socialism and oppose all free market capitalism outright? (Which is, not coincidentally, what many young people are doing.) For many people, liberalism simply doesn't look like a morality sound and principled way of looking at politics.

Liberalism as a Moral Worldview: The Principle of Equal Moral Agency

But is liberalism morally sound? To answer this question, we need to look at what liberalism is. Liberalism is the ideology that is primarily concerned with liberty, above all else. Socialism is more concerned with economic equality than liberty, conservatism is more concerned with maintaining tradition than liberty, and nationalism is more concerned with the future of the nation than individual liberty. Putting liberty first is the defining feature of liberalism, therefore. However, this cannot be liberalism's only feature, for liberty is also found in various forms in other ideologies. For example, in traditional feudal societies with absolute monarchies, the King had almost unlimited liberty. The lords also had an amount of liberty much greater than any citizen in a modern liberal democracy: for example, they had the 'liberty' to own and trade slaves. The unique thing about liberalism is that it aims to distribute as equally as possible the liberty of each person in society. Therefore, while nobody can have the liberties of kings and nobles past, everyone can have their fair share of liberty. While liberals disagree on how liberty can be distributed most equally, with some arguing for NAP-based libertarianism and others arguing for a strong welfare state, this often unspoken shared principle is what we have in common.

How does liberalism's dedication to distributing liberty equally make it a moral ideology? To answer this question,

we need to first look at what liberty is. Liberty is the power an individual has over their own actions, their ability to put their ideas into action. Therefore, looking at it from a moral perspective, liberty is moral agency, i.e. the ability to act in accordance with one's moral compass. An equitable distribution of liberty therefore ensures an equitable distribution of moral agency. In this way, liberalism ensures that every individual in society has an equal share of moral agency. At this point, we need to turn to the fact that liberty (and hence moral agency) are also finite resources: if some have more, others must have less. If lords can command slaves (therefore having more liberty), slaves will not be able to act according to their own moral compass, and thus have no moral agency. Therefore, in an equal distribution of liberty (and hence moral agency), everyone can have full moral agency over their own beliefs and actions, but nobody can have moral agency over another. This, I would argue, makes liberalism the ONLY morally valid ideology. Since all human beings are morally flawed to some extent, allowing some humans to have moral agency over others is morally impermissible. Allowing a lord to command a slave as he pleases means that the slave must commit an immoral act even if the act is both objectively immoral (as in absolute truth) and known to be immoral by the slave, as long as the act is not known to be immoral by the lord (or alternatively he is a depraved lord and does not care). This has several consequences. On an individual level, the slave would be morally responsible (at least in his conscience, and also by the laws of religion for those of us who are religious) for committing a moral wrong, knowing that it is wrong, but not being able to resist anyway. On a societal level, it also means

that those holding power can commit severe atrocities, without the moral consciences of other people acting as a brake. Which was actually how tragedies like the holocaust happened. One may be tempted to argue that, as long as we prevent having bad governments by being vigilant voters and by putting in place national and international regulations, nothing as bad will happen again. But this is naive, because the ability to judge if governments are good is limited by the fact that politicians often lie their way into power and manipulate the political landscape once in office. It is also still true that no human being can perfectly know the absolute truth of what is morally right or wrong, and therefore, if we simply let those in power decide for everyone, there will still be plenty of injustices, even if nowhere as great as the holocaust. The principle of Equal Moral Agency is the only thing that will prevent such injustices.

Liberalism's Individualism is Required by its Morality

The other thing about liberalism is that it is an individualistic ideology, i.e. it looks at individuals rather than groups of people or society as a whole. Socialism cares about the equality of social classes, and nationalism cares about the nation state as a whole, with both ideologies refusing to look at people on an individual level. In contrast, liberalism, insists that the equal distribution of liberty is to be implemented on an individual-by-individual basis. It is not good enough if, say, overall the people of Australia have the same amount of liberty as the people of Britain, if some people in both

countries don't get their fair share of liberty. It is also not good enough if, say, overall working class women have the same amount of liberty as middle class men, if some people in both socio-economic groups don't get their fair share of liberty. The liberal aversion to some forms of affirmative action comes from this principle. For example, no liberal should support the 'progressive stack' speaking system used at some Occupy rallies. Furthermore, unlike in many other ideologies, the same rules apply to governments, because they are also ultimately made up of individuals. Therefore, the government cannot have more liberty to make moral decisions than individual citizens, even if the government is democratically elected, and even if they claim to make the decisions on behalf of oppressed minorities. For example, the government cannot coerce anyone to accept a definition of marriage they don't agree with, even if it had a majority mandate to do so, and this applies for all possible definitions of marriage. This is why liberals equally uphold marriage equality (like the left) and religious freedom about marriage (like the right). Another example is that liberals should support the right of parents to withdraw their children from absolutely any class they don't agree with, in public schools. Many of the aforementioned political positions have caused rifts between liberals and leftists in recent years. But we liberals must stand our ground firmly, if we are to be true to our moral worldview.

While both liberals and leftists are historically considered together under the progressive umbrella, liberalism's insistence on individual rights at every turn has always sat

uncomfortably with the Left's wish for collective action on almost everything. The Left believes that collective, and often coercive, action can bring about progress much more efficiently. But this collective, coercive action is clearly in violation of the principle of Equal Moral Agency: those setting the agenda for the collective movement decide the course of action, and others have to follow for fear of ostracization or worse. In recent years, the Left's disregard for individuals' rights to have a fair share of moral agency has worryingly accelerated, as free speech has been replaced by safe speech (i.e. speech that is deemed politically correct by movement leaders), and measures like the so-called progressive stack, which clearly violate the equal right of every individual's voice to be considered, are popularized. Of course, while the Left claims to want more female, ethnic and LGBT voices to be heard, the moment one of these voices promotes an idea the leaders find 'regressive', it is shut down. As a result of this new straitjacket on leftist thinking, conformity within leftist ranks has accelerated, with those who are pro-life or have certain foreign policy views increasingly find themselves spat on by the movements they once considered their political homes. Meanwhile, the lack of a free speech culture means that feminist and LGBT movements are whitewashed to look like a homogenous whole without much dissent on key issues. The Left is clearly embarking on a misguided path.

Meanwhile, liberalism's emphasis on individual liberty and moral conscience provides a much better way forward for social justice. Liberalism encourages everyone to make their

case in the free market of ideas. The morality or lack thereof of each idea can be debated freely, and with individuals having the moral agency to put their ideas into practice, time will also tell what fruit their ideas will bear. In this way, the free market effectively decides the best, most moral and most fruitful, ideas that will survive into the future. John Stuart Mill called this the cauldron of ideas, with new ideas being added into the cauldron constantly and good ones living on, but I prefer the free market metaphor because it is, to some extent, a competitive process. A brand new idea, like a brand new product in the marketplace, is usually nowhere near perfect. The process of having to compete with competitors leads to modification and innovation, and even in some cases imitation, to make for a more competitive product. In the same way, ideas can be refined, and the morality of individuals and hence the society they live in can improve with time, just like how the quality of consumer goods improve with time. Also, in this free market of ideas, there is no need to subjectively judge whether ideas are progressive or regressive. If an idea is truly regressive, i.e. worse than what is already on offer, people will not 'buy it', much like how nobody can hope to make a profit off a business selling twenty-year-old computers. If an idea is truly regressive, it will not survive the free market of ideas. On the other hand, if an idea can thrive in the free market of ideas, then it cannot be regressive in an objective sense.

The Moral Libertarian Creed

Of course, what I have outlined above is only one reason to support liberalism. Both historically and in the present, there have been plenty of other reasons for liberal politics. Mill's liberalism, for example, was strongly associated with his utilitarianism, while my liberalism clearly has nothing to do with utilitarianism. Therefore, we need a specific term to describe the supporters of liberal politics who approach it from a moralistic angle, or more specifically, those who are committed to the principle of Equal Moral Agency as their creed. I propose that we identify as Moral Libertarians. Like civil libertarians being concerned primarily with civil liberties, we are primarily concerned with moral liberty. And just like civil libertarianism, moral libertarianism does not have a fixed economic program. Civil libertarians can be anything from minarchists to socialists, depending on their other beliefs. Likewise, moral libertarians can take a variety of economic positions, depending on their views of what moral liberty should entail and how it can be equitably distributed, informed by their own conscience. Thus moral libertarianism forms a new branch of the liberal tree, overlapping somewhat with libertarianism, classical liberalism, civil libertarianism and welfare liberalism in different ways.

(Revision from Volume 1)

Moral Libertarian Perspective: Equality of Moral Agency

The principle of equality of moral agency is central to moral libertarianism, because the need to allow every single individual their equal share of moral agency underpins the moral case for liberty and liberalism. As I have previously illustrated, liberals are not the only people who allow some kind of liberty, but we are the only ones who insist that liberty be given equally to every individual, not excluding those in government. Traditional feudalism allowed kings and lords almost boundless liberty simply by inheritance, but that meant slaves and serfs did not have any moral agency over their own actions, i.e. they could not act upon their moral consciences in their lives, but rather had to obey the consciences of their lords. We liberals, and moral libertarians in particular, cannot support offering anyone the kind of liberty kings and lords once had, because that would include having moral agency over other people, which means taking away other people's fair share of moral agency. Instead, we strive for every adult to have an equal amount of moral agency, which must therefore mean that everyone has full moral agency over themselves, and only themselves. But why is this important? And what does the application of this principle look like in practice?

What Equality of Moral Agency Implies

I believe that the principle of equality of moral agency is the most important principle in political morality, because it is the only way of distributing liberty (which is one and the same as moral agency, liberty being from a political rights perspective and moral agency from a moralistic perspective) that is consistent with the fact that every human being has equal moral standing from birth, and the fact that all human beings are flawed in some ways (i.e. not perfect and not capable of knowing the absolute truth in every sense). Let's start with the equal moral standing part. In fact, the founding fathers of the United States were some of the first people to recognise this: in their words, everyone was created equal, and therefore everyone has certain inalienable rights. Inalienable is the keyword here: these rights cannot be rightfully taken away by any action of any external authority, whether the authority comes from hereditary privilege or from collective mandate. Any action that compromises these inalienable rights are morally illegitimate. To believe that every human being is born equal morally requires that liberty (and hence moral agency) is distributed equally; in other words, a failure to distribute liberty equally is morally inexcusable, unless you happen to believe that people are not born equal. Now, let's look at the fact that all human beings are flawed. Because all human beings are flawed, nobody can certainly make the right decisions every single time. To allow one human being to make moral decisions for another against their will therefore potentially means forcing someone to commit a moral wrong even while knowing it is

wrong. Furthermore, allowing those in power to make moral decisions for everyone else means that, when the leader of a country doesn't get it right, the whole country commits a moral wrong. The worst example of this in all human history would be the Holocaust.

Mussolini, the Father of Fascism: He Who Does Not Believe in Equality of Humans

Now, let's look at what happens when the principle of equality of moral agency is not respected. Mussolini, the father of fascism, was a classic example of a man who did not believe in the equality of moral agency. According to Mussolini, all the individual wills of the Italian people had to be moulded into one, and in practice that meant he had all the moral agency in the whole of Italy and his people had none. This was consistent with his belief that he was some kind of superman who could do no wrong, as captured by the slogan 'Mussolini is always right'. As Mussolini thought that he was not flawed and always made the right decisions, he believed he deserved moral agency over his people because he would always make the right decisions while his people may not. But of course, this was pure hubris on his part, as in reality he was one of the most immoral human beings who ever lived, and the ideology he invented brought endless misery to countless numbers of people. To disrespect the principle of equality of moral agency, to think that one can make a better decision and hence should have moral agency over other people, is to have at least some of Mussolini's

hubris. While most people who believe in forcing their morality down other people's throats are nowhere as evil as Mussolini, their hubris is just as morally unsound.

Others who Disrespect the Equality of Moral Agency: Too close to Mussolini for comfort

The most classic case of Mussolini-style moral hubris is the kind of people who think they are carrying out God's Will, and hence have the authority to do anything in their 'mission'. Since they believe their ideas and actions necessarily reflect God's Will and hence the absolute truth, they believe there is no need to allow their human beings equal moral agency. This idea is most often associated with fundamentalist religious militants, who have caused tragedy after tragedy, who have committed utmost acts of evil while believing that they were carrying out God's Will. However, similar themes can be found in some sections of the religious right in the mainstream politics in many countries, who often self-righteously attempt to frustrate democratic mandates for liberal reforms because they think they are acting in God's Will. Thinking that one's beliefs in any area is certainly in line with God's Will is the same as thinking that one's beliefs, in that area at least, is 'always right'. This pattern of thinking leads straight to Mussolini-style hubris. On the other hand, a moral libertarian is allowed to have conservative viewpoints (otherwise it would defeat the point of moral libertarianism, right?), but they would need to make their case fairly and respectfully through the free market of ideas.

But it would be a folly to think that only those on the right are capable of such moral hubris. After all, Mussolini was left-wing when he was a young man. The left may not talk much in terms of God's Will, but they do talk a lot in terms of justice. Justice means the right thing to do, and is simply the secular equivalent of God's Will. Like how some of the political religious right think that their version of morality is always God's Will, an increasing number of leftists believe that their version of justice is always actual justice. When one starts to think this way, one essentially allows themselves the right to impose one's own version of justice on others, including those who do not believe in the same version of justice. For example, when authoritarian leftists believe that free speech leads to injustice, they insist that everyone practice safe speech (as they define it), and ideas that don't accord with their version of justice are met with actions of no-platforming, sometimes violent. Some moral libertarians may well share similar beliefs to these leftists in various areas, but out of respect of the equality of moral agency, would instead do their best to make their case in the free market of ideas, hoping to persuade other people to join their cause of action, while seriously dealing with the arguments thrown up by opponents. As a result of their morally unsound approach, the authoritarian leftists end up trying to impose upon everyone programs of 'justice' that even those who would supposedly benefit from don't want, like the kind of radical feminism that most women actually reject, or the kind of intersectional feminism that is actually GLIF (gatekeeper limited intersectional feminism, i.e. where intersectional oppressions only count if you have the correct

political beliefs too). On the other hand, moral libertarians can continue to refine their ideas of justice through competition in the free market of ideas, gradually modifying what they offer as a result of feedback from people's lived realities, resulting in ideas that benefit as many people as possible.

Equality of Moral Agency: The Basics

So for those of us who decide that we don't want any part of Mussolini-style moral hubris, that we wish to respect and honour the equality of moral agency in every way, where do we start? First of all, we need to see our ideological opponents as having equal moral agency too. As long as they are not shoving their beliefs down other people's throats, to live and let live is our only option. No-platforming and safe speech are too fascistic to even be considered. Secondly, we need to learn to love and respect the free market of ideas. While it is a good thing to be strongly passionate about justice, we need to make our case in the free market of ideas, and treat our ideological opponents as equals in the process. We need to be open to feedback, especially in relation to people's actual lived experiences. This will make our ideological 'products' more responsive to the actual needs of individuals and families living in the real world, and make them more 'competitive' in the marketplace of ideas. Rather than seeing everything in us-vs-them (or 'class struggle') terms, we need to see the development of ideas of morality and justice as a continual process of refinement, which is

facilitated by this free market of ideas, just like how the free market of consumer goods leads to the improvement of such goods over the years. Finally, we need to recognise that it is not up to any of us to determine subjectively whether each idea is progressive or 'regressive'. If an idea can thrive in the free market, it is by objective definition bringing new value to previously unserved populations and serving previously unmet needs, and is therefore progressive. If an idea is objectively regressive, i.e. it is worse than what is currently on offer in all respects and does not bring new value to anyone, it will not survive in the free market of ideas.

The Moral Libertarian Manifesto

Preamble

A ghost is hanging over the West: the ghost of liberalism. The ghost of only partly fulfilled yet already abandoned promises of life and liberty, of equality and fraternity. Liberalism is not quite dead yet, but nor is it truly alive. It can only watch hopelessly as far-right and alt-right white nationalist elements duel it out with far-left neo-Marxist tendencies, with liberty being the biggest loser of each and every battle. The right had made 'liberal' a dirty word for four decades, and now a new generation of the left is about to do the same, the two long-time enemies burying liberalism in a rare bipartisanship.

Is it too late for liberalism? No, not really. But to return to life, it will need a life force. Life force comes from conviction, from moral principles, and from confidence. Only the moral libertarian idea, with its grounding in the one simple principle of morality that has been the unspoken core of liberal thought in history, will be able to resuscitate liberalism and return it to its previous vitality. Moral libertarians seek to clearly spell out their principle of Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), and vigorously apply it and defend it in the free market of ideas.

The rest of this manifesto is structured similarly to Karl Marx's famous Communist Manifesto of 1848, not because we are Marxists, but because it is a familiar format, and the historic spread of Marxism is testament to the effectiveness of this format. We hope that the Moral Libertarian idea will spread far and wide. (We have however decided to make it shorter, because two centuries on people like reading long texts much less.)

1. What is the Moral Libertarian Idea

Liberalism is an idea with a history stemming from the Western Enlightenment. The old world of master and slave was being swept away. In its place, a long line of thinkers from John Locke onwards theorised about how we can have a structure of liberty and equality instead. Since then, much has been achieved, but as we all know, the project is still incomplete. Furthermore, since the early 20th century, the rise of new forms of collectivism have repeatedly threatened to put liberal ideas in the dustbin of history. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, many thought that the end of liberalism was inevitable, with fascism and communism being the only two choices in the future. Many fascists proudly claimed that individualism was for the 19th century; that the 20th century would be the century of collectivism. But liberty proved more resilient, and re-asserted itself in the post-war world, while fascism was largely discredited and buried once its immorality was exposed. More than half a century on, liberalism is again facing a crisis, and various forms of

authoritarian collectivism are again promising utopias of various kinds. Liberalism is not as popular anymore, in a world where the dichotomy is increasingly left vs right, socialist vs capitalist, 'anti-fascist' vs 'alt-right', etc.

But it would be too soon to declare the irrelevance of liberalism once again. Why? Liberalism is the most moral ideology, and ideologies that are immoral at their core will sooner or later be discredited, like the fascism of the interwar period. Liberalism will be left standing the victor, like in the post-war period, as long as it has not been completely killed by its authoritarian opponents. Therefore, our mission is to give liberal ideals as much life force as possible. Such life force can only come with idealism, moral conviction and clear principles. We believe that the one core liberal idea is the Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), i.e. each and every individual should have equal ability to live and act out their sincerely held vision of morality, and no outside force, no matter if it is an individual despotic ruler or the tyranny of collectivist pressure, should be able to diminish any part of this. This is in fact the only morally valid structure for society, because as inherently flawed human beings, none of us are morally correct all the time. Therefore, to be able to force another to abide by one's moral values will inevitably mean forcing another to act in a way that is immoral at least some of the time. To allow this would effectively be to allow the conditions that caused the Holocaust, where thousands of people enabled the Holocaust to happen just because they were not allowed to oppose the will of Hitler. In other words,

other ideologies are too similar to fascism, from a moral libertarian point of view.

Moral Libertarians argue for and uphold the principle of Equal Moral Agency at all times, on all issues, during all debates. We are well aware that we not only do not yet have equality of moral agency as things stand, the work to create a structure of equal moral agency will likely take generations to come. Each year, each decade, each generation, we strive to make things closer to the equality of moral agency, by insisting this principle be the core consideration for any policy of reform, and to encourage reform wherever we find that things are inconsistent with this principle. Bit by bit, we will be able to create a structure providing effective equality of moral agency for all. We are inherently reformist, because revolutions require there to be a strong leadership group, making this option against the equality of moral agency in principle. Furthermore, history has shown that once the leadership group is entrenched in power, it does not easily give up its extra moral agency (nor is it able to anyway). On the other hand, slow and steady wins the race.

Consistent with our core principle, Moral libertarians will strictly uphold the freedom of speech and freedom of conscience for all, and the freedom of religious belief for all. We will also strongly support reforms that remove state-sanctioned inequality of moral agency, for example marriage laws which privilege opposite-sex marriage above same-sex marriage. We will argue for the equal respect of individuals

regardless of their characteristics or their political beliefs, left, right or center. We will also argue, on the same grounds, for the equal respect and treatment of all individuals, regardless of ethnic background, gender and gender identity, sexuality, and disability status. We strongly oppose on principle all discriminatory treatment, whether justified from 'conservative' grounds of tradition, or 'progressive' grounds of historical debt or disadvantage.

2. Answering Criticisms of Moral Libertarianism

Does Moral Libertarianism harm traditions and traditional morality? No, it doesn't, simply. Moral libertarians oppose the top-down maintenance of tradition by those in power, but people are free to live by, embrace and promote traditional points of view. In fact, our staunch opposition to top-down enforcement will, especially in the longer run, prove to be the greatest protector of traditional values.

Does Moral Libertarianism fail to protect minorities and excuse bigoted behaviour? No, we staunchly argue against discrimination, and are the only political faction which does so consistently. While we cannot support reducing freedom of speech, we do not believe this to be detrimental to minorities, because only open discussion will be effective in changing attitudes. Furthermore, moral libertarians uphold John Rawl's famous Veil of Ignorance in all our decision making, and thus are politically race-blind, gender-blind and

sexuality-blind, while aiming to create systems that work for every single individual equally. Many of us support anti-discriminatory legislation in employment, for example, because we believe in society needing to be group-blind, as individualists.

Does Moral Libertarianism, with its encouragement of individualism, encourage selfishness and discourage communitarian thinking? Moral libertarians are opposed to the tyranny of the majority and strongly encourage individualist thinking. However, once individuals have their freedom to think and act, there is nothing preventing them from deciding to act for the benefit of the community. However, each individual will have their own right to determine what they believe is the greater good, rather than have a specific kind of greater good dictated to them by other people.

Does Moral Libertarianism neglect economic equality, especially historical economic equality? Moral libertarianism is not attached to any economic doctrine, and supports the democratic determination of economic policy, consistent with our support for democratic means of determination for every political issue that is unavoidably collective. In other words, every voter in the country should have a say. This way, we can have an economic policy that will serve the economic liberty of a broad range of people. The fact that, when the people have spoken they do not choose a certain economic policy (libertarian, Marxist, or anything in

between) doesn't mean that there is anything wrong. It's democracy in action.

3. Relationship to Other Liberal Movements

Moral Libertarians explicitly state the assumption that underlies all other liberal movements, thus its worldviews and aims do not differ from any other liberal movement, at the core. The main difference is that we explicitly proclaim and live by the principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA). Therefore, we avoid being liberal in technicality but being illiberal in practice. Left-liberals sometimes fail to challenge their further-left allies' encroachment on freedom of speech, while thin libertarians sometimes fail to challenge those who claim to be libertarian but are really Neoreaction-style authoritarian conservatives at the core, for example. By upholding the EMA, our liberalism is made stronger.

Where other liberal movements, including classical liberals, social liberals, cultural liberals, libertarians, and liberal conservatives, act according to the EMA principle, and are thus acting as truly liberal, we will support them. Otherwise, we will not.

4. Moral Libertarian Priorities for the Next Decade

In culture, we will uphold the freedom of speech and conscience for all. We will staunchly oppose any move towards so-called safe speech, and any attempts at no-platforming speakers, no matter what their political stance is. We will uphold freedom of religion for every individual, including the right to religious attire (opposing burka bans etc.), and the right to promote religious-based beliefs (e.g. the wide variety of religious views on abortion). We will also uphold the right of individuals to be entitled to express their sincerely held beliefs and truths, regardless of race, gender, gender identity or sexuality. Therefore, we support multicultural liberty (e.g. the choice of singing competition contestants to sing in a foreign language every week if they wish to), and we support LGBT liberty (e.g. the liberty of any gender expression without negative consequences from society). We will discourage everyone in society from taking cultural opinion personally or adopting a victim mentality, because this will be bad for rational discourse in the free market of ideas.

In politics, we will advocate for the removal of state-sanctioned privileges on both grounds of individual privilege and cultural value privilege, including unequal marriage laws and adoption laws, and work regulations that unfairly impact religious minorities, for example. We will also advocate for strong action to protect the sanctity of free speech and the prevention of so-called safe speech and no-platforming from becoming the new norm.

Why a Moral Libertarian must not be Utopian or Revolutionary

Some people have asked me: is moral libertarianism a utopian philosophy? After all, we don't have anything remotely like equal moral agency yet, and we aren't likely to get there in the next decade. My answer would be that an ideal that we can work gradually towards is, by definition, not just a utopian dream. It is an ideal that will take generations to work towards, but we are making good progress. Looking back a century ago, for example, would reveal that people have a lot more equal moral agency today compared to back then. As long as we keep the ideal alive and let it guide our reformist path forward, we will gradually get there.

Moral libertarianism is, in fact, incompatible with utopianism of any kind. Why? Someone's utopia must necessarily be different from another's. Under the principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA), nobody will be allowed to implement their own version of utopia. Instead, everyone will have to settle for compromises when it comes to collective issues. Thinking about it, allowing anyone to implement their own version of utopia will necessarily be oppressive to those who disagree. Therefore, moral libertarianism removes this possibility for a good reason.

Which brings me onto my next point: moral libertarianism is necessarily evolutionary and reformist. A revolutionary program can never be compatible with the principle of Equal Moral Agency, when you think about it. Revolutionary action requires collective action, and such collectivism necessarily requires the extensive obedience of individual wills to the collective will. Where the individual will is in the minority and hence is opposed to the collective will, the individual will lose moral agency, which is instead given over to those representing the collective will, i.e. the majority. Moreover, revolutions generally require strong leadership, and in that case the leaders have a lot more moral agency than anyone else. History has taught us that once people have too much moral agency over others, it will be impossible to make them relinquish it without yet another revolution, which may create the same problems over again.

Revolutionary socialists in particular have aimed to challenge moral libertarianism by pointing out the lack of actual equal moral agency where there remains gross economic inequality. And in this, I do not argue that they are wrong, at least in the situation of our current reality. As previously mentioned, equality of moral agency is an ideal to work gradually towards, rather than to demand overnight. In my opinion, we have two options going forward to deal with this problem: firstly, to reduce and eventually eliminate actual poverty, and secondly, to reduce and eventually eliminate the extra influence that 'money can buy'. Both of these areas are important focuses of both political and socio-cultural reform. Moral libertarians prefer this gradualist approach

because it is the only one that will bring us the results we want in the longer term. A revolutionary approach can never bring equal moral agency in the end, because it has to set up situations of unequal moral agency as a means to bring about revolutionary change. On the other hand, reformists work things through the liberal democratic system, and therefore are already building a situation of equal moral agency bit by bit with each debate and each reform. The debate of individuals in the free market of ideas is the inherently liberal way to progress, after all.

Furthermore, revolutionary socialists generally advocate for the abolishment of all private property and the collectivization of everything as part of their revolution. As I have said elsewhere before, a society where everything is collectivized allows no individual will, because the collective will is needed to approve of almost any action. It must necessarily follow that there will be a tyranny of the majority, where those in the majority will have all the moral agency, and those in the minority will have next to none.

The exact reformist path towards a state of equal moral agency is not yet clear. However, I believe that if we uphold this principle in every single issue and reform we consider, we will get there gradually. After all, history tells us that letting an ideal inspire gradually unfolding reform, as seen in the liberal evolution of British society for example, is a much better way than setting up a grand narrative of history and

forcing that narrative onto reality, as is the case in many (failed) revolutionary movements.

On the other hand, I believe we should always be on guard for any attempts to roll back the equality of moral agency that we have already achieved. Therefore, any attempt to deliberately introduce inequality of moral agency, whether from the left or the right, should be seen as inherently against morality and therefore strongly resisted. This includes both right-wing attempts to introduce race-based nationalism and left-wing attempts to introduce safe speech and progressive stacks as commonly accepted conventions.

The Moral Libertarian Argument Against Early-21st Century 'Class Struggle'

On why Moral Libertarianism is incompatible with contemporary identity politics

In recent years, much has been said about the divisive radical identity politics that is tearing our society apart. Left-leaning liberals and progressives, who were once reluctant to criticise these movements out of a misguided concern for 'progressive unity', are becoming increasingly frustrated. But most people still don't seem to get the point of these movements. The words of liberals lamenting how American Left views on issues of identity and equality have strayed far from those of Martin Luther King and Barack Obama in recent years have become a refrain among those who have been more awake to the problem. However, putting it this way frames the problem as a misguided development in a movement still otherwise committed to the values of King and Obama. Rather, to put it bluntly, sections of the Western Left have been hijacked by an alien ideology that shares almost nothing in common with historical liberalism.

The Ideology that is sort of Marxist but not quite like the Marxism we are familiar with

The kind of divisive identity politics we are seeing is based on a political ideology, an ideology that is perhaps not yet well understood by the majority of liberals and progressives. Those behind the divisive drama do not even want the same things as mainstream liberals and progressives. In conventional Western politics, we are conditioned to see politics as a spectrum, from 'extremely liberal' to 'extremely conservative'. However, this spectrum presupposes that there are only two main worldviews, which recent events have thoroughly discredited. To put it simply, the ideology behind the recent divisive identity politics looks like this: it is an ideology that believes the only way to change is to tear apart our existing social fabric, because there cannot be real change in liberal reform, no matter what. It is an ideology that believes there is no point in rational debate and changing people's minds, because the playing field will always favor the privileged, no matter what. It is an ideology that believes it's always going to be an us-vs-them world, at least until some kind of revolution, and the only way to progress is for the oppressed to win and the formerly privileged to lose. In this worldview, to achieve social change, the 'oppressed' would have to develop a consciousness of being oppressed, and fight for victory over their 'oppressors'. Such an ideology would have to constantly create conflict so as to make its case for how useless reformist politics is, and to arouse the fighting spirit of its adherents. Therefore, it needs to make the most of every perceived injustice, no matter how insignificant: the value is in the fight, not the issue itself. Hence the pointless culture wars over inauthentic Asian food, or over Beyonce in an Indian dress. This kind of thinking has probably been lurking in the shadows of the

extreme left for at least several decades. With rising frustration in society and the ease of spreading ideas via the internet and social media, it now has a substantial audience and support base.

The idea that it would be better for the oppressed to rise up as a group and fight their 'oppressors' as a group, without consideration for individual guilt or lack thereof, is actually not a new idea. It probably originated in the Marxist idea of class struggle, where the working class would develop class consciousness, and come together to struggle against the propertied class, to bring about a revolution and establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. While Marx only intended for his idea to apply to economic classes, this idea has since taken on a life of its own, as ideas often do. After all, economic classes aren't the only fracture lines in society where this model could be applied. This is why, in late identity politics, it has all been about 'group consciousness' and group claims. The similarity of some of the language used in identity politics movements with traditional Marxist language hints at the historical origin of their model of social change. Of course, this is a very illiberal model of change, in that it violates the equality of every individual and the right of every individual to pursue life, liberty and happiness. But radicals, in the true sense of the word, have never quite agreed with America's founding fathers, anyway. This probably explains why some identity politics movements do not see any irony in asking whites to march at the back, for example.

More on the Methods of Radical Identity Politics

Radical identity politics is essentially a distorted form of class struggle politics, and for practitioners of identity politics, much of the time the value is in the struggle itself. In fact, we need to completely drop the illusion that radical identity politics of any form is somehow about controlling thought and behaviour through specific policies or actions: it's not. History has taught us that the most effective way of gaining support for otherwise unpopular and illiberal ideas is when you have a divisive situation, where people feel oppressed, or are in a struggle state of mind. Therefore, for extremists of all stripes, it's really all about creating the struggle. While the free speech we so value is often the first victim, we must not fall for their invitation for struggle. By deliberately aligning oneself against radical identity politics, one can only give fuel to the struggle, which in turn emboldens the growth of identity politics. Instead of being drawn into the proposed 'struggles', we need to re-assert the importance of free speech, but we also need to bring those on both sides of each argument along, and be able to re-assure them that the liberal democratic process, including free speech and the free market of ideas, is a fair one for all.

For Moral Libertarians, there is simply no Common Ground with Radical Identity Politics. Appeasement is also Not an Option.

In the face of divisive identity politics, true liberals who believe in the way of America's founding fathers, Lincoln, King and Obama alike must take a strong stance against it. This is because, first and foremost, the ideology behind radical identity politics is simply incompatible with the values of liberalism, including the equality and autonomy of individuals, the right of every individual to pursue life and liberty for themselves, and democratic governance via peaceful processes. Every time radical identity politics is practiced, it is effectively spitting into the face of liberal ideals.

For committed moral libertarians, radical identity politics is fundamentally a violation of our most basic principle of morality. As moral libertarians, we believe that situations or movements are only morally sound when all individuals have Equal Moral Agency (EMA). While this is an ideal that can't always be met in real life, any deliberate move away from this ideal is to be considered inherently immoral. In radical identity politics, people are often allocated moral agency (e.g. in having a platform to speak or not) in a deliberately unequal way. Furthermore, individuals in supposedly marginalised groups who do not take up the 'fight against oppression' (as dictated by self-appointed movement leaders) are often treated as 'class traitors', and have their

moral agency deliberately taken away as a result. Therefore, there is simply no way a committed moral libertarian can accept working with practitioners of radical identity politics under any circumstances. Instead, we must strongly and clearly oppose radical identity politics at all times, as a matter of moral principle.

Proclaiming the Liberal Alternative

The best alternative to radical identity politics is liberalism, with its message of liberty and equal opportunity for all, and treating each individual as independent and equally important rather than as members of a class or group. In a society where the great ideals of liberalism are commonly accepted, there simply will be no place for group-struggle-based divisive identity politics, and the authoritarian control of thought and speech that inevitably comes with it. However, I must stress again that for liberalism to have widespread support, it must be seen as truly serving everyone, and living up to its promises. It must also be seen as a more moral ideology than its rivals.

Therefore, as liberals, we need to abide by the core principles of liberalism, and apply it equally to all sectors of society, majorities and minorities. I believe what makes liberalism different from (and better than) all other ideologies is its commitment to giving everybody equal moral agency. As reformists (rather than revolutionaries, because

revolutionary action is incompatible with moral libertarianism), we understand that we won't get there overnight, but in each era of society we try to make things more liberal, for example by upholding everyone's equal right to free speech, by encouraging rational and objective debate of social issues, and just as importantly, by trying to remove discrimination and prejudice using liberal means. As liberals, our historical achievements in social reform include the equality of political rights regardless of race or gender, the end of slavery and segregation, the end of colonialism and the establishment of a system of international diplomacy, and yes, marriage equality. We must not downplay this legacy just because we are currently engaged in a bitter argument over freedom of speech and conscience with the far-left. Especially when these achievements would have been impossible without free speech and the free market of ideas.

The Moral Libertarian Case Against Safe Speech, Progressive Stack and No-Platforming

Free speech has always been a cornerstone of Western society post-Enlightenment. However, several recent developments are threatening this important tradition: the promotion of safe speech, progressive stack speaking systems, and the increasing acceptance of no-platforming. As we will discuss one by one, all these practices are to be regarded as immoral and unacceptable under the Moral Libertarian worldview, where every individual must be granted Equal Moral Agency (EMA) as much as possible.

Safe Speech

Practicing safe speech, according to its proponents, means making sure that all speech is sensitive to the need to avoid psychologically harming minorities. On the surface, it looks like a noble goal. Surely, whenever I say things, I do try my best not to be hurtful to others. However, the problem is that safe speech is generally not just a matter of personal practice, based on personal conscience. It is policed by both activism and peer pressure. Those who are determined to have breached safe speech codes are punished with a variety of social consequences. Therefore, safe speech is actually a form of censorship against free speech.

Since Moral Libertarians demand that every individual must have Equal Moral Agency (EMA), we cannot accept the practice of censoring free speech, even for theoretically noble reasons. Furthermore, our insistence on this point is based in morality: that no individual is anywhere near moral perfection, and therefore no individual has the moral standing to require another individual to submit to them. It also doesn't matter if those demanding submission are in the majority: since all human beings are flawed and imperfect, even the majority's decisions are not guaranteed to always be more morally correct than the lone individual who disagrees. Therefore, the majority shutting down the speech of that lone individual can still be a potential moral wrong. In other words, the majority, made up of flawed human beings, still do not have the moral standing required to be able to shut up the lone dissenting individual. It doesn't even matter if the majority is 100% certain of their moral righteousness: when you are a flawed human being, your '100% certain' still doesn't equate to the Objective Truth.

Now, theoretical arguments are not persuasive for everyone, so let's look at an actual example. While safe speech has most often been argued in the context of preventing racist and homophobic speech, this is only the thin end of the wedge. Already, there have been attempts to use 'safe speech' to justify disallowing people to say that abortion is immoral, and I actually agree that this is the logical conclusion if you uphold the safe speech principles

consistently. Therefore, the application of safe speech can (and actually should) mean that we cannot hold discussions about the morality of abortion at all! My point is that, whether you personally think that abortion is morally acceptable or not, shutting down debate on such a controversial issue would amount to oppressive silence for both sides, and a repudiation of what has always been society's consensus on how to deal with controversial issues. Furthermore, thinking about it, many other morality debates can be shut down using similar justifications, leading to society simply putting a lid on every controversial issue. Nothing but total, oppressive silence. Therefore, the undesirability of 'safe speech' is far from only theoretical!

Progressive Stack

Progressive stack systems are speaking systems where disprivileged minorities are given first priority to speak. According to its proponents, progressive stack will give minorities more of a voice. Again, even though the intention is noble, moral libertarians simply cannot accept it. Firstly, the fact that some people are assigned a higher speaking priority already makes progressive stack completely incompatible with the notion of Equal Moral Agency. But even more importantly, progressive stack systems require regulation to work, and those 'regulating' the system will have complete moral agency over everyone else, since they control whether other people are even allowed to speak at all! Where people have been given a higher priority to speak,

they will have been granted this privilege by the regulators, and will be pressured to not upset the regulators. Thus the regulators inevitably end up with a high degree of influence over many other individuals' speech. This is clearly not acceptable for somebody committed to Equal Moral Agency and a free market of ideas.

No-Platforming

Finally, the most outrageous form of speech censorship on the rise today is no-platforming. No-platforming refers to the deliberate denial of a platform to speak for one's opponents. Practitioners of no-platforming eschew the tried and true way of changing people's minds with polite and rational debate. Instead, they directly prevent their opponents from speaking up in the first place, for example by pressuring university administrations to cancel appearances, or by shouting over people as they speak. This is, without need for explanation, a flagrant violation of Equal Moral Agency. It is also the metaphorical equivalent of shutting down the marketplace (of ideas) by oppressive force, thus preventing people from 'buying' what they want.

Think about this: what gives anyone any right to no-platform another? As a fundamentally flawed human being, you don't have any more (or less) moral standing than any other human being. You simply don't have the moral standing to

prevent another human being from speaking. Isn't that clear enough?

Moral Libertarian Perspective: John Rawls and the Veil of Ignorance

Contemporary liberalism is heavily influenced by the ideas of John Rawls. In particular, his veil of ignorance theory has had a very strong impact on liberal thinking. Essentially, Rawls argued that people should make decisions under a 'veil of ignorance' about their own position in society, for such decisions to be truly impartial and hence offer equal opportunity to everyone. Here, I will argue that the Rawlsean veil of ignorance actually complements the moral libertarian principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA) very well.

Firstly, a recurrent criticism of liberalism is that its individualistic orientation encourages individuals to be selfish. Liberalism has been characterized by some as a system that encourages individuals to focus on pursuing their self interests. However, if individuals are encouraged to act under the Rawlsean veil of ignorance, they will be making decisions removed from their own self interests. This shows that liberalism, especially a liberalism that is guided by strong moral principles, does not have to be inherently selfish.

Secondly, I would argue that making democratic decisions under the veil of ignorance is effectively the same as upholding the principle of Equal Moral Agency. This is because, under the veil of ignorance where one supposedly

does not know where they stand, one would generally make decisions that will not disadvantage people in any given position in society. This means that such decisions would have to adhere as closely as possible to distributing moral agency equally among every individual. Therefore, for those unsure of how to uphold Equal Moral Agency in collective decisions, the veil of ignorance is perhaps the best starting point.

Finally, the Rawlsean veil of ignorance effectively prevents all forms of divisive identity politics. When one is not supposed to know one's identity in society in the first place, how can one practice identity politics at all? The disabling of identity politics also disables a variety of illiberal ideologies, including race-based nationalism, the Oppression Olympics, trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF), and neo-Marxist class struggle revolutionary politics (where identity groups replace the economic classes in orthodox Marxism) alike. Hence practising thinking from a veil of ignorance point of view is a good way to ensure we stay true to liberal values and practices.

In conclusion, while the Rawlsean veil of ignorance concept is not the same as the moral libertarian Equal Moral Agency principle, the two are sort of similar, and complement each other very well.

Moral Libertarian Perspective: False Political Maps give us False Promises of Collectivist 'Liberty'

Ever since the classical left-right political axis of the French Revolution became woefully inadequate to describe the variety of existing political platforms, there have been various proposals of two-dimensional models. The most common version, the one that appears to have become the new de-facto standard, involves adding a socially libertarian vs authoritarian scale in the vertical axis, leaving the horizontal left-right axis to economic matters. This is the kind of map that online tests like Political Compass use. The fact that Political Compass has inspired a countless amount of memes from all sides of the political landscape shows the level of common acceptance of this model.

However, what is commonly accepted is not necessarily what is correct. After all, it was commonly accepted that the Earth was flat in the middle ages too! In fact, I have identified one important flaw in map: part of the map cannot practically exist. Which part of the map am I taking about? The part where you can have next to no economic freedom but lots of social freedom, i.e. the bottom left corner in Political Compass. Of course I understand that economic freedom is not perfectly correlated with social freedom. There have been societies which were dictatorships but had lots of economic freedom (e.g. Pinochet's Chile), and there are

societies where economic freedom is limited but there is still considerable social freedom (e.g. Western and Northern Europe). But I would argue that, where economic freedom drops to nearly zero, social freedom would also have to drop to nearly zero, as a rule.

Why would that be the case? Because where there is no economic freedom at all, there is simply no individual agency to do anything meaningful at all. When all the property is collectively owned, everyone would need collective permission to be able to do anything with any piece of property. When all the means of production are in government hands, the only people who get to decide what is produced are the rulers. At this point, you need to remember that access to property and means of production are required for almost any meaningful activity. Without my computer I can't be typing this. Without your computer you wouldn't be able to read this. Therefore, in societies where there is no economic freedom, governments end up controlling all social activity by default. They also get to control the pool of ideas, and therefore what people can and cannot think, by default.

As you can see, there really can be no 'bottom left corner' of the political compass. The extreme bottom-left corner, i.e. a 'libertarian socialism' which collectivizes all private property but just doesn't have a 'government' as we know it, does not offer social liberty. In fact, when you think about it, the collectivization of property would practically require some

sort of governance. Even if it doesn't look like the kind of government we are used to, it would still fulfil a similar role. And since there will always be people who do not want to be part of that collectivization, the system would need a way to enforce that collectivization too. Therefore, 'libertarian socialism' is, in my opinion, not too different from Stalinist 'authoritarian socialism' in practice. The two-dimensional political maps just give them an opportunity to brand themselves as very different, when in fact they are not so different.

All this reminds us that, as liberals, we need to care about practical outcomes of liberty or lack thereof, rather than just accepting situations that are 'theoretically pro-liberty'.

The Moral Libertarian Case Against Promoting Myths

Moral libertarianism calls for a vision of a genuinely free market of ideas, where individuals with Equal Moral Agency (EMA) can participate in the debate, criticism and improvement of every idea. Of course, such a system would only be functional if there is no deceit. That is, everyone is required to participate in the free market of ideas in good faith, with every individual aiming to contribute to their best ability towards moving things closer and closer to the truth. To achieve this, we need to promote the importance of being sincerely truthful at all times when it comes to discussing big ideas with moral implications.

The Promotion of Myths is Dangerous

People don't always act in good faith, unfortunately. It is not uncommon for people to put ideas forward, not because they believe it will get us closer to the truth, but because they want to provoke certain reactions, to get certain results. The most common form of this would be the person who would say anything to gain attention or to further their career. Even more dangerous would be to promote myths to inspire political action. The first person who explicitly argued for the promotion of myths to generate political action was probably 19th century French thinker Georges Sorel, who believed in using the myth of the General Strike to further

class struggle. Mussolini, the father of fascism, was strongly inspired by Sorel. In fascism, it was instead myths of nationalism and race that were used to generate political action, action that would lead to previously unimaginable horrors. The experience of 20th century fascism stands as the strongest reminder of how dangerous it is to promote myths in order to advance political ideology.

However, the promotion of myths do not have to be deliberate. While most people are not as immoral as to promote political myths deliberately, the unconscious promotion of political myths can be just as dangerous. For example, promoting the idea that immigrants are destroying the traditional culture of the country can easily fan racist and ultra-nationalist sentiment, that will be translated into illiberal political action. Another example is the promotion of the false idea that the political centre is continually moving to the right, which is quite common in leftist circles. This idea leads people to falsely believe that they should embrace far-left politics to counter a trend that does not really exist. (I mean, how is our current political centre to the right of the 1950s centre? How is this belief even logical?) The unconscious promotion and propagation of myths most commonly occur in echo chambers, something which we must avoid at all costs.

Nobody is Entitled to Their Own Truth

Another way the promotion of myths can be justified, either consciously or subconsciously, would be through moral relativism. Moral relativism is the belief that each cultural group can have their own version of the truth, and the differing versions of 'truth' are not objectively better or worse than each other. It would follow that whatever a group believed sincerely could be counted as truth by definition, at least for that group. It would then follow that, for example, if a group believes that it is oppressed, it is their truth, and they should have the right to promote and propagate this view with impunity. This actually leads directly to the justification of promoting political myths! After all, many Germans in the 1930s did feel that their race was being oppressed, especially after being fed Nazi propaganda. Failing to critically examine this belief led to the biggest horror of all time. While moral relativism actually arose later, its attitude of allowing subjective feelings to be equated to truths would be in line with what happened in 1930s Germany.

Of course, there is an objective truth, and there is an objective morality, that is not the result of cultural or social construction, and that cannot be altered by social engineering. The fact that people may differ in their interpretation of truth is a function of the limitations of human ability and the flawedness of human existence. Thus, while moral libertarians should uphold the right of individuals to speak out about their sincerely held beliefs without penalty from others, this should stem from recognising that no human being is always right, and that no human being has

the adequate moral standing to prevent another from speaking, rather than any kind of moral relativism. Moral libertarianism insists that individuals are entitled to speak up about their most sincerely held beliefs about what the objective truth is. This is, however, very different from the idea that individuals should be entitled to their own truths, regardless of the objective truth.

Moral Libertarian Principles can Resolve Issues Beyond the Limits of Classical Libertarianism

Libertarianism has traditionally relied on the Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) to resolve all issues. The NAP states that nobody can initiate violence against another. In practice, it also means that government authority (and therefore potential violence) in all issues is to be disallowed, except for protection against violent crime and violent destruction of private property. Good as the NAP sounds, more and more people are finding it very inadequate for solving a variety of issues in the modern world.

People have been turning to libertarianism for its apparent fairness, because it is an ideology that treats individuals as individuals with equal standing. In libertarianism, there is no governmental exceptionalism (i.e. the government does not have a right to act beyond the NAP), no structural unfairness or reverse discrimination allowed (e.g. the so-called 'progressive stack'), and no ability to justify such structural unfairness on Orwellian Newspeak. It is therefore refreshing for many. However, the lack of practicality in the application of the NAP ultimately leads many to abandon libertarian ideals.

Ultimately, disallowing violence except for self-defence is an expression of the equal standing of human beings, and it is this equal standing of human beings as individuals that leads to the disallowance of centrally planned economies, reverse discrimination dressed up as social justice, and the like. Therefore, I believe that the principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA) that moral libertarianism is based on is actually similar to the NAP in spirit, but allows more practical application in a wide variety of areas.

Here are a few examples of what I mean:

Drug Policy

In classical libertarianism, there is simply no scope to have a debate on drug policy at all. The NAP requires that there can be no prohibition against any drug being legally available on a commercial basis. Since the provision of such 'goods' do not involve violence, there can be no government authority (and therefore potential violence) to stop it. However, for most people, this is a woefully inadequate approach to such a controversial and sensitive problem.

On the other hand, the Equal Moral Agency (EMA) approach allows a healthy debate. Does allowing a commercial market for 'recreational' drugs increase or decrease the equality of moral agency? On one hand, it increases the freedom of the

individual against government regulation, therefore increasing the equality of moral agency. On the other hand, it allows companies to market addictive and potentially harmful substances for the purpose of making an ongoing profit. You could legitimately argue that, once people are addicted to the product, they certainly don't have Equal Moral Agency to the company selling it.

Animal Rights

Animal rights are another area where libertarianism is often thought to be lacking. Put it simply, classical libertarianism does not allow any animal rights at all, because ill-treatment of animals is not associated with violence between citizens in any way. However, this attitude is seen as repulsive by the vast majority of the general population.

On the other hand, moral libertarianism and the EMA principle is grounded in the need to allow each individual full and equal moral agency, to act out their sincerely held moral vision as much as possible without interference from collective pressure. Since there can be no argument that ill-treatment of animals advance any morally useful purpose, laws banning such actions are not against the EMA principle. Conversely, one can argue that the government, which has the right of rule over the land, has therefore a responsibility to protect the 'natural environmental elements' in the land, and the decision as to how to achieve this goal should be one

based on democratic mandate, like all other 'unavoidably collective' issues.

Financial Sector Fraud and Regulation

In classical libertarianism, there isn't much scope for government regulation of the financial sector, because financial transactions are non-violent. However, in recent years, bad practices in the financial sector has led to the ruin of many lives across the world. Just sitting there and saying you can't do anything about it will clearly not be acceptable to many people. On the other hand, the Equal Moral Agency (EMA) approach allows government regulation to clamp down on financial sector fraud and malpractice, to restore customers' equal share of moral agency.

In Conclusion

The principle of Equality of Moral Agency (EMA) is indeed different from the Non-Aggression Principle (NAP), and therefore they don't always produce the same policy conclusions. However, EMA is actually based on the same individualistic and 'morally egalitarian' spirit as the NAP. Using the EMA principle to think about issues fosters the same individualistic, non-biased and non-affirmative attitude as using the NAP, but the EMA allows much more ground to

consider issues and points of view that are generally considered important in broader society.

Of course, strict thin libertarians and especially thin libertarian immediatists would strongly disagree with using the EMA in place of the NAP. However, we are not all strict thin libertarians, and when given the choice between NAP-based libertarianism and other conventional ideologies, over 95% of the population would rather choose other conventional ideologies and forego the individualism, objectivity, and anti-tribalism found in libertarianism. The EMA approach of Moral Libertarianism provides an alternative that allows people to embrace these values even if they cannot embrace NAP-based libertarianism.

The following are articles that I wrote in 2018, not necessarily about Moral Libertarianism itself but about the application of Moral Libertarianism to contemporary issues.

Open Letter to Liberals and Moderates who Support Donald Trump

Firstly, let's start with who this letter is addressed to. If you support Donald Trump and you are neither conservative nor alt-right, then this letter is probably for you. This includes centrists, libertarians, liberals (classical liberal or otherwise), moderates, or those who were just plain old sick and tired of politics as it stood.

Unlike some fellow liberals, I think that the accusation that all Trump supporters are either racist or don't care about racism is absurd. I mean, if it were between Trump and Hitler, Stalin or Pol Pot, I think every single liberal would support Trump too, to use an exaggerated example.

However, I still strongly believe that support for Trump is misguided, and that recent events have vindicated my view. So if you will listen, I will explain why I see things this way.

Trump the Warrior Against Political Correctness and Free Speech?

A recurring theme I have heard among liberal and moderate Trump supporters was their frustration about political

correctness. I have heard countless times that you admire Donald Trump for being politically incorrect, and think that he can act as a bulwark to stop political correctness from progressing further. I agree that political correctness and the policing of speech is inherently illiberal, and should be opposed. I also agree that it takes guts to be politically incorrect in this day and age. However, the fact that Donald Trump is politically incorrect doesn't mean that he will be useful in stopping political correctness. Quite the opposite: practitioners of radical identity politics are driven by a controversially expanded version of the Marxist theory of class struggle, and having a president they perceive to be racist, sexist and homophobic will only serve as a call for them to step up their struggle, which is what we have seen since Trump's election. Vulnerable minorities who fear for the quality of their everyday life have also become increasingly predisposed to this kind of 'struggle' politics. The situation for free speech in areas of life that are under leftist control has gotten much worse, as a result. Moreover, Trump's authoritarian governance style has served to erode the pro-liberty consensus, allowing far-left elements to promote authoritarian viewpoints (e.g. that Stalin wasn't wrong because a strong government is required to steer society on a socialist path) much more openly than they did during the Obama administration.

Are Liberals Going Right to Fight the Far-Left?

Furthermore, voting for Trump just because he is the opposite of the politically correct far-left is, in my opinion, yet another example of a worrying trend. In recent years, an increasing number of liberals and moderates seem to harbour illusions that sticking to rightist orthodoxy is a good way to fight leftist intolerance. For example, the classical liberal Professor Jordan Peterson caused controversy last year when he stated that he would not support marriage equality if it was supported by the neo-Marxist left. Another example is how some self-identified liberals are now refusing to treat trans and non-binary people with due respect, for example by refusing to use their preferred pronouns, because that would be participating in radical feminist social engineering. However, this ignores the historical mission of liberals to consistently support liberty and equality before the law, and oppose traditional orthodoxy that promotes conformity and negates individuality. A rational liberal will also have no problem with treating a small minority of people with due respect and helping to make their lives better, fully knowing that it would have no impact on the rest of the 98% of the population. If there are any radical feminist attempts to use this minority to socially engineer the rest of society (e.g. to 'abolish gender'), we can oppose this separately (perhaps even with the said minority's support after winning their trust). We have to be clear about one thing: supporting and justifying Trump and/or toeing the conservative line will not save liberalism from the far-left;

instead it will discredit liberalism and allow more young people and minorities to be recruited by the far-left.

On Trump vs the Social Justice Warriors (SJWs)

The view that SJWs only care about identity politics seems to have caused a lot of resentment, and driven many people to find salvation in Donald Trump, the ultimate anti-SJW. However, this simplistic view is actually incorrect. Far from being committed skills for radical identity politics, I believe that many SJWs can potentially be convinced to come on board the bandwagon of liberty for all. From my experience, most SJWs are actually genuinely interested in improving the lives of people, rather than simply wanting to 'turn the tables of oppression'. It's just that some of them have been influenced by the neo-Marxist school of group struggle identity politics, perhaps without even consciously knowing it. It's sort of like a re-run of the 1960s and 70s, where students who simply wanted to challenge arbitrary authority and protest the Vietnam War were influenced and used by radicals with other agenda. Looking at SJWs today, we need to remember that most 60s and 70s radical students ultimately changed their minds and became rational reformists. A society-wide rational discussion on what liberty and equality for all should actually look like would be able to win many SJWs back to the liberal fold, in my opinion. However, the divisiveness of the Trump administration has been preventing much needed constructive conversation, and progress on this front remains very limited as a result.

On Making America Great Again, Economically

Another reason why many people voted for Donald Trump was a belief in his promise to Make America Great Again. There is little doubt that he sincerely believes that his protectionist ways would revive the American economy. But such thinking is considered outdated by the vast majority of economists. In fact, recent concerns about Trump launching a trade war against China have dampened the prospects of an otherwise healthy recovery. Besides, protectionism is illiberal and authoritarian, and liberals should be against it on principle. We should instead stick to being champions of free trade.

On the Forgotten Everyday People

One of Donald Trump's greatest appeals is that he seems to stand for the forgotten everyday people. It appears to many people that in a world where corporations only care about their own profits, and social justice warriors (SJWs) only care about certain minority groups, The Donald is speaking for the average American. But this couldn't be further from the truth. Donald Trump is not only part of the one percent, he also appears to be just as out of touch with ordinary Americans as the rest of the one percent. His recklessness in attempting to start trade wars that may affect many

industries, his tax cuts for the very rich, and his insistence that ObamaCare be repealed, are all testament to this.

In Conclusion

It is understandable that many of you are frustrated. The rise of radical identity politics, the increasing political correctness and censoring of free speech, and the influence of authoritarian ideas in 'progressive' circles are not trivial problems. But Donald Trump cannot be the answer, because he just makes things worse. Instead, we need to work constructively towards restoring faith in the liberal worldview. Being principled about our liberalism would be a great starting point.

How the Far-Left is Harming Feminism and LGBT Rights

In the early 21st century, sometimes the threat to progress comes even more from the far-left than the far-right

Feminism has a long and complicated history, with lots of contradictory developments throughout. It is easy to say that one is a feminist, or alternatively, one is anti-feminist, without being critical enough of what one is actually saying. Put it simply, the original definition of feminism is the movement which seeks equality on gender grounds, especially the equality of opportunity for women compared with men in every aspect of life. Almost every feminist still upholds this definition today. However, with many anti-feminists also upholding what is in the definition, how then is feminism and anti-feminism different, even opposites? The truth is, anti-feminists are probably largely not opposed to feminism per se, but rather, they are against something else that they associate with feminism, rightly or wrongly. Let me explain.

What is Feminism, anyway?

Feminism, in its original form, was a logical consequence of the liberal ideal that everyone should be entitled to equal

opportunity. As a Moral Libertarian, I like to use the term Equal Moral Agency to describe this commitment. If everyone is entitled to equal opportunity, surely women should be entitled to equal opportunity as men, without judgement about their gender? This is why many classical liberals, including John Stuart Mill perhaps most famously, were strong supporters of feminism as it existed in their time. This form of feminism is now called liberal feminism. On the other hand, by the time of the 'Second Wave' of feminism in the 1960s to 80s, another 'feminism' had emerged: 'radical feminism'. One that was inspired not by the ideals of classical liberalism, but by a combination of radical ideologies, including Marxism, anarchism, critical theory, and certain strands of post-modernism. This mixture gave rise to theories about privilege-group consciousness, and the idea that biological science is just a construct, perhaps even a patriarchal construct. To be fair, radical feminism is a broad church, and not all radical feminists embrace all the aforementioned ideas. Therefore, not all forms of radical feminism are extreme, but some definitely are, in my humble opinion. In the rest of this argument, I will focus on a subset of radical feminism I consider to be particularly problematic: neo-Marxist feminism.

Today, the situation with feminism is complicated, and in my humble opinion, a bit sad. I personally strongly identify as a liberal feminist, supporting the kind of feminism that John Stuart Mill supported back in his day. However, I cannot, in my good conscience, support neo-Marxist feminism, which is having increasing influence in the feminist world today. With

its ideas centered on oppression and struggle, neo-Marxist feminism in practice often seeks to turn the tables of oppression more than it seeks to create equality. That's why there is the misconception that feminism is about men vs women. Well, at least classical liberal feminism was not. But neo-Marxist feminism is, in my opinion, too often about the 'struggles' of the 'oppressed' women against the 'privileged' men. A lack of concern about the real life struggles (pun intended) of young men is a potential conclusion of this worldview. Meanwhile, young men who have been failed by this worldview are increasingly becoming anti-feminists, or even turning to the alt-right. When liberal feminists question this struggle-based zero-sum worldview, they are also often told to check their privilege by their more radical 'sisters'. Which is why some just stay silent, and others quit the feminism thing altogether.

A 'Revolution' Most of Us, Male or Female, Simply Don't Want

Another way in which some (but not all) neo-Marxist feminists poison the feminist brand is via their ardent opposition to traditional values, and the structure of society. Of course, liberal feminists, and liberals more generally, don't accept every bit of tradition as sacred. The difference between liberals and conservatives is that, while both recognise the importance of the traditional values that have evolved over centuries to guide our lives, liberals believe that traditions sometimes need a bit of reform to give everyone

truly equal opportunity, and that such reform will not be harmful to the survival of traditions. But liberals, throughout history, have wanted to enhance and extend traditions, rather than destroy them. Freedom of conscience, respect for reason, the importance of marriage and family values, individualism and freedom of religion have guided liberals in our reforms, even as we applied these concepts in a different way compared to conservatives.

Neo-Marxist thinking, on the other hand, is very different. Some neo-Marxists believe that almost everything can be a social construct designed to favour dominant groups and keep the oppressed in their oppressed state. (This, in turn, stems from their belief that all social constructs in the 'superstructure' are determined by the economic 'infrastructure' of capitalism, making them inherently oppressive.) Therefore, they believe they should 'struggle' to, in their own words, dismantle many things that are dear to the rest of us, including family values, individualism, and even the scientific method of reasoning in some extreme cases. If people associate all this with feminism, then it is no wonder that people are turning away from feminism.

Radical feminism, LGBT ally? I don't think so.

Radical feminism has positioned itself as the strongest ally of LGBT people in recent years. Underneath this position, however, is an important contradiction. Many branches of

radical feminism strongly believe that gender is a social construct. The 'traditional' radical feminist position of rejecting transgender people stemmed from this belief, and even today, TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) still justify their transphobia by saying that trans women weren't socialised as women from a young age. While most radical feminists nowadays have quit being transphobic, they have not given up on the core idea that animates the transphobia of TERFs. Therefore, some trans individuals continue to take this as a sign of less than full acceptance. I tend to agree with them, because, after all, if gender is not rooted in some sort of biology, then trans people would just be making a lifestyle choice. In other words, full acceptance of LGBT individuals can only be grounded in an understanding of gender that is rooted in biology.

An associated issue is the acceptance of gender non-binary people (NBs or Enbies), and the use of gender neutral pronouns. I consider myself well educated in human biology, and I at least cannot rule out the natural existence of people whose neurological wiring is somewhere in between the usual binary genders. I mean, if we accept that intersex people exist (which is not disputable at all), and we accept that neurological wiring can in rare cases differ from chromosomal sex (which is what we accept if we accept binary trans people), then there is no logical reason to say that non-binary people definitely do not exist. Furthermore, I believe in trusting people's own feelings as to what they actually perceive about themselves, because that tends to be more accurate than any other measure we have at the

moment. Therefore, I strongly support equality and acceptance for non-binary people, and the use of gender neutral pronouns at their request. The rest of us (99.9% or more) can continue to function according to the gender binary, while we make compassionate exceptions to the rule for this small minority.

On the other hand, the radical feminist 'acceptance' of the non-binary simply cannot be rooted in the same reasoning as my own, because they believe that gender is a social construct. The logical conclusion is that anyone should be free to 'choose' to identify as non-binary, and it may even be a good thing to do that, because the gender binary, like all 'privileged' social constructs, needs to be challenged. Now, correct me if I am wrong, but I think this amounts to saying that identifying as non-binary is a lifestyle choice, rather than an agonizing decision an individual takes to feel more comfortable in their own skin. This, in turn, has caused conservatives to reject non-binary people and gender neutral pronouns completely, thinking of them as radical feminist inventions designed to dismantle our gendered culture. As you see, radical feminism is putting ideology before people. This shows that, a radical feminism that believes gender to be a social construct is not only ideological and anti-reality, it is also inherently and irredeemably transphobic.

Is feminism still needed, anyway?

As I have said before, I personally identify as a liberal feminist, who supports the original, classical liberal feminism dating from the First Wave. Many anti-feminists say that they don't differ from myself on this point, but that in the West the ideals of the original feminism had already been achieved, so it is no longer needed. I would disagree with them here, for two reasons. Firstly, while things have gotten more equal, equal opportunity is perhaps still not 100% there yet in every aspect of society. Moreover, we need to keep the movement up to prevent re-establishment of inequality as the social and economic structures of society continue to evolve. Secondly, even if the remaining discrimination is not huge, it still matters to many people, and without the maintenance of classical liberal feminism, people will increasingly turn towards forms of radical feminism, some of which have unpalatable consequences for society. Therefore, the work of liberal feminism remains important.

Reviving Liberal Feminism

A revival of classical liberal feminism is much needed. But it cannot occur in a vacuum. Liberal feminist ideas will dominate the world of feminism once again only when liberal values of liberty, equality and fraternity; of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, finally triumph over the zero-sum neo-Marxist worldview of oppressions and struggles everywhere. We need to, therefore, first revive the classical liberal ideal itself.

My case for liberal values is a moral one. As a Moral Libertarian, I believe that every individual needs to be accorded Equal Moral Agency, i.e. to have the ability to live according to their sincerely held moral beliefs as much as every other individual. In this view, individuals need to be given individual liberty, and cannot be seen as simply groups or classes of people pit against each other. Where individualism triumphs, people will be able to participate in a free market of ideas, where everyone should put their best ideas forward, so that we can solve problems in an inclusive, rather than oppositional, way.

As a moral absolutist, I believe that treating individuals as individuals and according them equal moral standing is an infinitely more moral stance than treating people as merely members of groups which are inevitably pitched against each other. I also believe that most other people in this world will agree with me. It is up to us to stop the 'dialectical struggle' trainwreck by putting our much better alternative forward. Here's to liberty, equality and fraternity, applied in a race-blind and gender-blind way, for all!

It isn't just Gamergate anymore: Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) have an Important Choice to Make

Let's hope they choose liberty for all.

Social Justice Warriors (SJWs) are one of the most influential cultural and political groups at the moment. Since their emergence in the Gamergate controversy at the last turn of decade, they have been instrumental in pushing forward various movements, including the emerging Fourth Wave of feminism, Black Lives Matter, as well as many LGBTI rights movements. Meanwhile, SJWs are also increasingly the subject of backlash from all quarters of society. Anti-SJW videos have become a big genre on YouTube, with a million views being not uncommon for the most popular talking heads in that genre. Anti-SJW political memes are also commonly encountered on social media.

Are SJWs Anti-Freedom?

The main complaint about SJWs is that they are against freedom. It appears that, while a few anti-SJWs may genuinely be opposed to social justice, the vast majority are simply opposed to what they see is illiberal behaviour from SJWs. Many believe that, by 'trolling' SJWs, they can register their protest and hopefully change things. Meanwhile, SJWs

generally don't believe they are involved in illiberal behaviour.

So, have SJWs been involved in illiberal behaviour? Let's look at the evidence. There's safe speech: that's plain illiberal, no ifs, ands or buts. I mean, practising safe speech in a designated private meeting may be okay, but getting society at large to practice safe speech is nothing short of oppression. There's no-platforming: again, clearly illiberal, since freedom of speech is perhaps the first rule of liberalism. There's the Oppression Olympics and the so-called progressive stack. That's again clearly illiberal, because human beings are being judged by their group affiliations rather than their individual merit. Finally, there's the radical identity politics, where people are divided into the oppressors and the oppressed. That's not really compatible with liberty, equality and fraternity, right?

The evidence is in. Unfortunately, certain SJW behaviours have been quite illiberal. The Anti-SJWs do have a point here. Unlike most anti-SJWs, however, I actually sort of admire SJWs. I think most of them have their heart in the right place. Let me explain.

Firstly, it's not a bad thing to be passionate. If nobody was ever passionate, we wouldn't have things like liberal democracy, the end of slavery, universal suffrage, gender equality and gay equality, to name a few important historical

developments. We shouldn't hate passion. However, we should definitely be on the lookout for passion being channeled into hateful or destructive courses. After all, passion also gave us Robespierre and the Jacobins. From what I can see, SJW passion is being increasingly misguided.

Secondly, most SJWs are not anti-freedom at heart. They probably don't care enough about freedom, but that's just because they don't know why it is so important. Rather, SJWs are passionate about equality and social justice, and are perhaps too impatient to get it. This leaves them open to the influence of neo-Marxist ideas, which promise them a shortcut to a utopia with equality for all, if they 'struggle against oppression' with ferocity. Moreover, their impatience also leads them to believe the neo-Marxist lie that liberal democracies are ineffective and our system is somehow 'inherently oppressive'.

What is Neo-Marxism, Anyway?

What is the neo-Marxist influence I'm talking about? Well, recently whenever I talk about neo-Marxism, Jordan Peterson almost always comes up in the conversation. However, neo-Marxism has nothing to do with Peterson, except for the fact that he is very aware of it. And forget whatever Peterson has told you about neo-Marxism. His theory about Foucault and Derrida and French postmodernism is merely a distraction, in my opinion.

Basically, neo-Marxism is an extended application of the theories of Karl Marx into non-economic areas, something that Marx himself would likely have opposed. Whereas Marxism was about the 'struggle' between workers (the proletariat) and bosses (the bourgeois), neo-Marxism has generalised this to struggles between any oppressed group and their supposed oppressors. Neo-Marxism, thus, is a generalised form of what Marxism calls 'dialectical struggle': people divided into two opposing categories, with struggle being inevitable between them. The neo-Marxist worldview therefore pits women against men, non-whites against whites, queer people against straight people, and so on. They propose that if the oppressed do not develop a group consciousness of being oppressed (analogous to class consciousness in classical Marxism) and hence struggle as a group against their oppressors (analogous to class struggle in classical Marxism), they will keep getting oppressed. Obviously, there is no place for the individualist notion of liberty and the equal dignity of human beings in such a worldview. Not when some people are effectively seen as the equivalent of 'class enemies'.

In my opinion, a lot of the misguided things SJWs are doing have been encouraged by neo-Marxist thinking. The struggles over acceptable speech, historical monuments, national days of celebration, and the division of people into categories of oppression all contribute to an increased and broadened sense of struggle in society. Bad for society, bad for social

justice (because it entrenches existing attitudes), but good from a neo-Marxist point of view (because we get closer to 'overthrowing' the system, whatever that means).

I trust that most SJWs sincerely want Social Justice. But they need to think critically.

Most SJWs are not neo-Marxists. Most of them aren't even familiar with Marxist theory at all. In fact, the problem with SJWs is that they don't think critically enough, about the source of the ideas they receive, and what agenda those ideas serve. Maybe this is because a lot of them come from a culture of 'activism' meaning the sharing of memes and blogs on social media, plus or minus joining some protests. But activism without critical thinking is dangerous. The point is, it's high time SJWs start thinking critically. For example: why would a worldview that divides people into two opposing groups and pits them against each other be good for social justice at all? Wouldn't that just create a divided and hyper-polarized society? Doesn't pitting people against each other on the basis of race effectively encourage white people to join alt-right and white nationalist movements? Don't men also have a mother, and women also have a father? Don't most gay people come from straight families? Why does this 'dialectical' division even make sense at all?

Note that neo-Marxist ideas often don't present themselves as clearly neo-Marxist. Sometimes, they aren't described

using the usual Marxist jargon. But ideas should be judged by their essential character and effect, rather than the language they are delivered in. SJWs need to be smart enough to recognise neo-Marxist thinking patterns. If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then I'm afraid it's a duck after all.

Very soon, the SJW movement will face an inevitable choice. We hope they choose liberty.

Right now, the majority of SJWs continue to listen to both liberal advice and neo-Marxist advice, and continue to sort of side with both groups simultaneously. However, these days are coming to an end. Liberals and neo-Marxists are increasingly at odds with each other. Liberal complaints about neo-Marxists methods, goals and worldviews are increasing by the day, and serious attempts at re-establishing the sanctity of free speech and the free market of ideas are well under way. On the other hand, neo-Marxists are increasingly looking towards rebuilding a 1970s-style mass movement of interconnected struggles and strikes, with memes like 'shut up liberal' and 'communism will win' as their background music. SJWs will have to choose to go with either camp, very soon.

I sincerely hope that SJWs will choose the liberal way. Of course, I would say that as a liberal, right? But if SJWs truly understand where their values come from, they would choose the camp of liberty, equality and fraternity. After all,

feminism came from liberalism, and early feminists were liberals. LGBT rights and marriage equality were first supported by liberals, back when conservatives and socialists alike were staunchly homophobic. It was no accident that liberals, who always insist on the equal dignity and moral standing of every individual, were the first to embrace these causes. While conservatives were dogmatically clinging to every bit of tradition, and while Marxists were looking for their grand narrative of historical materialism to manifest itself in the West, liberals preferred to look at the experience of society on an individual by individual level.

SJWs are passionate and morality-orientated people at heart. That is why many traditional justifications of liberalism have not appealed to them. For SJWs, the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill doesn't care enough about minorities, Adam Smith's case for free market capitalism sounds too materialistic, and the classical libertarianism of Murray Rothbard focuses too much on dead objects (i.e. private property) and too little on living people. On the other hand, the Moral Libertarian principle of Equal Moral Agency (EMA) should be more attractive to these people, since it talks about the moral righteousness of liberal values, rather than just practical justifications.

Occupy Wall Street: a lost Liberaltarian opportunity

Coming up to seven years since the Occupy Wall Street protests, perhaps we have reached a good time to look back at the movement in hindsight. Occupy Wall Street started out as a protest against the disproportionate power of the 1% against the 99%. It was a protest against corporate power. Occupiers literally occupied the Wall Street area by setting up camp there. The movement also grew over time, with more and more people joining. There was even a shared kitchen and a medical clinic. While the first Occupy was in Wall Street, similar protests quickly spread throughout America and the rest of the Western world. Hence Occupy became a movement in its own right.

What did the Occupiers want, anyway?

Participants of Occupy hailed from diverse political backgrounds. There were people who were left-liberal, socialist, libertarian and apolitical alike. Which was not surprising: each of these groups had their own grief against corporate power. For left-liberals, it was the inequality in wealth and opportunity. For libertarians, it was corporate welfare, crony capitalism and protectionist measures that distorted the free market, making it hard for new entrants to compete. For socialists, their opposition to corporates was

more ideological. Anyway, people generally focused on their common message, rather than their political differences.

A Lost Liberalitarian Opportunity

Several observers thought that Occupy presented an opportunity for Liberalitarian co-operation. Liberalitarianism, first coined in 2006, refers to co-operation or even some ideological fusion between libertarians and left-liberals (or simply Liberals, in common American usage).

Liberalitarianism thus proposes a way to somewhat heal the great liberal divide of the early 20th century. Liberalitarianism was first proposed as an alliance against Bush-era neo-conservative foreign policy (e.g. the 2003 Iraq War) and social conservatism (e.g. the Bush administration's attempts to stamp out gay marriage). By the Obama era, there initially seemed to be less of a case for this sort of alliance. However, the shared frustration with the uneven playing field in contemporary capitalism emerged as a new common cause during Occupy.

Libertarians and left-liberals were not going to agree on everything. The former's insistence on shirking government and the latter's insistence on growing the welfare state weren't going to change, for example. But there was indeed plenty of scope for co-operation towards ending crony capitalism and making the free market work for all individuals again. Alas, this did not happen. Why? Both

libertarians and left-liberals were out-organised by another force, one which wanted to end free market capitalism altogether.

The Neo-Marxist Influence in Occupy

Libertarians and left-liberals may differ quite substantially on what they perceive as a working free market economy, but both believe in some sort of free market economy. On the other hand, neo-Marxism had no time for any sort of free market capitalism. Neo-Marxism, an ideology that originated in the non-Communist West in the late 20th century, was a fusion of Marxism with other radical ideologies like critical theory, radical feminism, and privilege theory, while also drawing heavily on post-modern analyses of power. One thing it did share with classical Marxism was its hatred for all capitalism. Hence the neo-Marxists were generally unwelcoming of libertarian presence at Occupy movements. Many even openly said that libertarians did not belong in the movement. This was possibly the beginning of the strong hostility displayed towards libertarianism in many left-wing circles we see today.

But unlike classical Marxism, neo-Marxism is not only about economics. Plenty of neo-Marxists are actually strongly focused on cultural issues (the 'superstructure' in Marxist theory), opposing capitalism partly because they believe that cultural structures can only change when we abandon the

capitalist economic system (the 'infrastructure' in Marxist theory). Hence, where there was neo-Marxism, there was cultural conflict. For example, the imposition of progressive stack speaking systems in many Occupy protests towards the later stages of the movement drove many people away. (Progressive stack operates by prioritising speaking order based on how 'oppressed' the speaker is.) After all, nobody wants to be told that they need to 'check their privilege' and forfeit their right to speak.

Revisiting Occupy, for the sake of Liberty

In the end, liberals of all stripes (left-liberals, Democrats, libertarians alike) did not do too well out of the Occupy movement, even if they may have been there right from the start. Not only was the liberaltarian proposal for co-operation abandoned, liberals were also unable to argue for a renewed commitment to truly fair and free market economics for all. Instead, Occupy became a springboard for collectivists of all stripes, including neo-Marxists, to practice their ideology and recruit more people into their ranks. For the far-left, Occupy was the place where a mass movement was showcased, and alternatives to liberal democratic norms like the progressive stack were popularized.

But as liberals, I believe we should revisit exactly what happened in Occupy. Why were liberals out-organized? Why did the liberaltarian proposal for co-operation fail? Why did

liberal ideas lose out to collectivist ideas in the competition for hearts and minds? I believe it was because the core values and ideals of liberalism had become faded and almost forgotten over time. Locke and Mill, Rawls and Nozick, Keynes and Hayek, they were almost polar opposites in many policy positions, but they were all passionately committed to liberty. And that passion is what we need to reclaim.

I believe that a morally driven liberalism will be key to rekindling liberal passion in the 21st century. For example, under the Moral Libertarian doctrine of Equal Moral Agency (EMA), we have strong justification for resisting collectivist inventions like the progressive stack. We also find strong justification for the superiority of free market based logic, as in the free market of ideas. It really is a complete toolkit for fighting back against the rise of illiberal 'alternatives'.